

Teacher-Scholar: The Journal of the State Comprehensive University

Volume 5

Article 3

January 2013

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Recommended Citation

Greenleaf, Justin; Kastle, Seth D.; Brown, LeAnn M.; and Whitaker, Brett L. (2013) "A Teaching Model for International Expansion at State Comprehensive Universities," *Teacher-Scholar: The Journal of the State Comprehensive University*. Vol. 5 , Article 3.

Available at: <https://scholars.fhsu.edu/ts/vol5/iss1/3>

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A Teaching Model for International Expansion at State Comprehensive Universities

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International partnerships have the potential to benefit state comprehensive universities, which, like other areas of higher education, are experiencing deep and transformative change. George Mehaffy (2010), for one, identifies the changing demographics and desires of students, the increased demand for globalization, and the lack of traditional funding sources as factors threatening the norms of higher education. Brian Denman (2007) describes the rise of world and off-shore universities in response to the growing competition for providing education in the international market and outlines the variety of arrangements that have been established, including satellite campuses, memorandum of understanding schemes, corporate programs, international consortia and alliances, and distance education programs (p. 11-12). With regard to SCUs, these partnerships offer a mutual benefit, as the domestic institution sees increased enrollment and the associated revenue stream, while the international partners and students are able to access critical curriculum and programs that otherwise would not be offered at their institutions (Altbach and Knight, 2007). At the same time, and especially given the competition, it is important that international partnerships are designed correctly from the beginning. Rovai and Downey (2010) provide several areas where some distance education programs fail and others are successful in this global competition, including planning, faculty development, online course design and pedagogy, and quality assurance.

Since 2006, the Department of Leadership Studies at Fort Hays State University (FHSU) has offered its Bachelor of Science degree program in Organizational Leadership internationally through the university's strategic partnerships with two partner schools in China in addition to the traditional on-campus and domestic online modalities. The partnership created between the Department of Leadership Studies and the Chinese universities is intentionally structured to provide an American degree to international students in their country using an innovative curricular model: the cooperating teacher/instructor of record (CT/IR) model. The CT/IR model consists of a blended learning approach and uses two distinct roles to educate students. The first half of this model refers to the instructor of record (IR). Best understood as the content expert, the IR is typically a faculty member that holds an advanced degree in leadership or a related field. These individuals are expected to have teaching or course development experience in addition to their qualifications in the field. Hiring of these positions is typically very similar to a traditional

search that might be conducted for an on-campus faculty member. These individuals are responsible for developing the curriculum, assignments, and assessments that will be used to teach the course content to the students in the class. Additionally, the IR is responsible for the majority of the grading throughout the class, and the assignment and assurance of final grades.

One important way that the CT/IR model allows for efficiency is in the hiring of IRs. Institutions that utilize a similar model are able to select from a much broader pool of qualified applicants by recruiting and hiring faculty to work domestically rather than internationally. Historically within this program, having domestic appointments for the IR improves retention and reduces turnover.

IRs are typically hired as full time, non-tenure track faculty. These instructors meet the same academic qualifications as on-campus faculty of equivalent rank and conduct teaching, research, and service, with their primary responsibilities being instruction. IR faculty are generally required to maintain some on-campus presence to participate in active service within the department and the university; however, the nature of the program design allows much flexibility in the physical location of the faculty member.

The other half of the model is the cooperating teacher (CT). The CT works with the Department of Leadership Studies to assist with and improve the delivery of relevant course content at the partner institutions. These individuals are process experts in that they administer the tests, assignments, and lectures while serving as the “face” of the class to the students. Often, the CTs do not have prior knowledge of the curriculum; however, they have experience serving in a facilitative role or teacher. For more information on the roles and responsibilities of the CT/IR see Table 1 below.

Table 1
Roles and Responsibilities of the CT/IR

Cooperating Teacher	Instructor of Record
Interacts with students on a regular basis.	Content expert for the course.
Administers tests, assignments, and lectures.	Develops curriculum and course content.
Serves as the “face” of the class to students.	Completes the majority of grading.
Does not have to have prior curricular knowledge.	Course liaison between universities.
Is always on-site at the partner institution.	Not required to be on site.

The role of the IR is one that is easy to understand in that it fits the traditional model of education. The introduction of the CT, however, is less familiar and often raises questions about the need for the CT and their role in the class,

the quality of instruction offered, and the communication structure between the CT and the IR. These questions often arise out of a desire to ensure that quality education still occurs through the interaction between the IR, the CT, and the international students. As the partnership has developed over time, the Department of Leadership Studies at FHSU has attempted to address these concerns.

The necessity of the CT role originates from the English proficiency of the international students whose native language is not English, and English may be their second or even third language. The degree being offered at the partner institutions is delivered in English and students are required to complete a number of assessments (such as the TOEFL) prior to entrance into the degree program. Unfortunately, passing these assessments does not ensure that the students will have the same comprehension of the course content that a native English speaker would. The use of cultural references, idiomatic expressions, and the amount of reading required are examples of challenges facing international students in these American classes. In many ways, the CT serves as the interpreter between the content provided by the IR and the understanding of the international students. The CT does not build lecture materials or design content; however, they ensure that the content developed by the IR (process described below) is understood by the international students.

One important consideration when initiating a new international program is the type of course content delivery model used and its alignment with institutional and program objectives. This program utilizes a hybrid CT/IR approach that allows for face to face interaction in a classroom environment, but with the ability to handle a large volume of students through a division of labor between the CT and the IR. Alternatives to this model might include face-to-face direct instruction or purely online instruction with no physical classroom experience. While each model has strengths and weaknesses, the CT/IR model encourages a balanced approach that provides the student-faculty interaction of the face-to-face classroom with the efficiency of online programs.

As an interpreter of the content, it is important to make every effort possible to ensure that the meaning being conveyed by the CT is both understood by the international student and that it is communicated in the way the IR intended. The first step to addressing these issues involves the hiring of the CT. Even though the CT is technically employed by the partner university, the CT selection process is carefully overseen by the departmental faculty and the department has final approval. Prior experience in leadership coursework is preferred and English as a first language is required. Once hired, the next step is to train the CT in how to work specifically with Chinese students and also how to understand the content provided by the IR. This occurs during an intensive one week training prior to starting work at the partner university. In the first two days of training, CTs are trained to work with Chinese students. They receive specialized instruction from FHSU faculty and staff on Chinese culture, learning styles, and EFL strategies. The rest of the week is spent working closely with the IR reviewing course curriculum and objectives, meeting with the IR to answer questions, and observing classes taught by on campus

faculty to ensure that the IR and CT have a similar understanding of what is expected in the course.

At the end of the intensive training the CT and the IR both travel to China to begin the school year. The first week of the Fall semester at both universities are team taught by the CT and the IR. This is done, in large part, to ensure the quality of the education being received by the international students. Through this process the IR has the opportunity to demonstrate the way that the content should be delivered. The IR also has the chance to observe the CT interpret the content and then to provide feedback as to how they might improve. After the classes have started, the IR returns to America and works with the CT and the international students at a distance through the Blackboard Course Management System (CMS).

The delivery of the course content at FHSU is facilitated through the Blackboard CMS. The IR records the lectures that will be given in the class using lecture capture software (e.g. Articulate or Prezi). Those lectures are then uploaded to the course shell and supplementary materials such as assignments, quizzes, or reading materials are added to the learning modules. Once the course shell is complete and the content is ready for delivery, the international students and CTs are added to the course. Each user has an individual login with either student level access, teaching assistant level access (CT), or instructor level access (IR). To this point, the classes are similar to a traditional distance education class. The difference, however, is the hybrid approach provided by the face-to-face classes that meet twice a week at the partner institutions. The students in China meet in mediated classrooms and the content is delivered during a scheduled class time with the CT and students in attendance. The class begins by viewing the learning module and, once complete, the rest of the time is reserved for discussion and clarification of the content led by the CT.

The IR and the CT communicate on a daily basis via email and/or Skype. This allows the CT to ask questions and get clarification from the IR. It also allows the IR to get feedback from the CT on how the class is going and gauge the level of understanding of the students before assignments are submitted. One experienced CT at a partner institution provided the following remarks regarding her experience with the CT/IR model, "What I find most exciting about the CT/IR model is the team effort between the IR and CT wherein we work together to produce a unified delivery method for coursework through communication and classroom activities. The students benefit because they have the strengths of both the CT and IR promoting their educational achievement." The CT and the international students meet in the same way that a traditional instructor would in a face-to-face class. Classes are held twice a week and the CT holds scheduled office hours for students to visit and ask questions about the class. If the CT does not have the answer, they have easy access to the IR for clarification.

The model described above faces several unique challenges. In the history of this particular program, the hiring of CTs has been an obstacle. CTs are selected and employed by the partner institutions, in consultation with

representatives from the domestic institution. Ideally, the partner institution would identify a broad pool of candidates, but in practice this is often not the case. Identification and recruiting strategies for hiring qualified CTs has been an ongoing challenge of the program. Low salaries from the partner institutions for CTs has exacerbated the problem by creating high turnover and low retention of CTs over time.

One major consideration faced in an international cross-border program such as this is the cultural differences facing the institutions in the partnerships. Specifically within the field of Leadership, House et al. (2004) describes the various ways in which leadership is perceived, understood, and practiced in different parts of the world. However, these differences are not limited to the leadership content. They also include the way in which students learn and interact with the CT and IR (e.g. memorization vs. critical thinking). These cultural differences and others have been difficult throughout the partnership and have required a great deal of time and attention through the evolution of the program.

Another major challenge is the language barrier. While students in the international program are admitted based on their ability to speak and write in English, there are still challenges. While this model was designed to address the gap in understanding by providing the CT for assistance, students still struggle with some of the more abstract concepts presented in the lectures and text. For example, when the IR or the CT use an idiom or make reference to a past or current event in American history, that information may not be widely known or understood in China. It is then the role of the CT to explain the concept or reference. One positive outcome from this interaction is that students tend to develop improved English competency alongside their academic content expertise.

In addition to cultural differences and language barriers, the logistics of facilitating classes halfway around the world also bring a new set of challenges. While the content can be delivered in an asynchronous environment, there are times when synchronous communication is required. A 13-hour time difference between the two institutions dictates that there is only a small window of time for convenient synchronous communication between the CT and the IR. Unfortunately, these times are often not when classes are being offered so issues or problems that arise in class relating to content often have to be tabled until the next class.

Conclusion

The CT/IR model has provided many benefits for both the state comprehensive university and partner institutions. The two international partnerships have grown to represent nearly one-fourth of the total enrollment for FHSU. This initiative has also increased the internationalization efforts for both FHSU and partner institutions allowing international opportunities, and programs for faculty, staff, and students. Working with international partners breeds both cultural awareness and an international thought process for both

faculty and students involved. The Department of Leadership Studies has doubled its FTE (teaching faculty) since 2008 to support this endeavor. This teaching model has been positively described by several stakeholders. One administrator associated with the program stated that “The use of the CT/IR model has proven to be an excellent model for delivery for both the Department of Leadership Studies and our international partners. From a learning perspective, this model provides an opportunity for our students, faculty, and cooperating teachers to exist in a cohesive cross-cultural learning environment, focused on leadership education and development.”

Increased globalization, the use of technology throughout the world, and the changing dynamics of funding sources for higher education have forced SCUs to reexamine their traditional model of education. One strategy to address these needs is the use of international strategic partnerships with other institutions of higher education. If implemented correctly, these partnerships can provide support for the international institution and the state-comprehensive university. The CT/IR model discussed in this article provides an opportunity for SCUs to offer curriculum to other parts of the world utilizing an efficient and affordable design. While not without challenges, the CT/IR model has demonstrated the ability to maintain quality of education and learning through the knowledge, skills, and attitude assessments used throughout the program. This proposed teaching model could be adopted by SCUs to inform and improve other distance education programs and partnerships domestically and abroad. This model could also be used to expand internationalization efforts of SCUs throughout the United States.

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